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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SENATOR MITCHELL'S VISIT TO PARIS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark A. Pekala, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) Summary. Senator Mitchell: The timing of your second visit to Paris could not be better. You will find your interlocutors energized by the President's speech in Cairo and his subsequent visit to Paris and Normandy. They will be eager to follow up on the President's bilateral with President Sarkozy, and will be especially eager to hear about your discussions in Syria. Above all, they look forward to getting a sense of your strategy for the next 6-12 months, and will want to know how they and other like-minded European states can contribute to the success of your efforts. End summary.

Strong Support on the Peace Process

12. (S/NF) Thanks in part to your visit here on Feb. 2, the frequent phone contact between French NSA Jean-David Levitte and NSA James Jones, and the subsequent visits by Under Secretary Burns, A A/S Feltman and others, the French are more responsive than ever on the broad range of our mutual interests in the Middle East. Sarkozy, for example, delivered a verbal thrashing to Iranian FM Mottaki on June 3, calling President Ahmadinejad's statements on the Holocaust) delivered immediately before Mottaki's call at the Elyse) & a diplomatic insult,8 stressing that there is no chance of dividing France and its allies on the nuclear question, warning that Iran's current course will lead to disaster, and calling upon the Iranians to take advantage of the historic opportunity provided by the President's opening. Sarkozy was personally impressed by the President's handling of Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to Washington, which his staff described as &masterful.8 The French President will likely adopt the same approach) friendly but frank) during a pending visit by Netanyahu. &We are 100% supportive of your efforts,8 Sarkozy's Middle East advisor told us recently.

13. (S/NF) Indeed, the French have quietly abandoned their attempt to get the EU to stake out a more flexible position on dealing with Hamas, and have reluctantly conceded that Sarkozy's plans for a peace conference in Paris are not going to materialize in the near term. The only remaining point on which there is any daylight between our positions is on the question of timing: Sarkozy continues to fret about the pace of the process and believes strongly in the need for Western leaders to push the parties toward final status talks. Although he does not hide his sense that the U.S. approach (i.e., creating the conditions for successful negotiations before moving to the negotiations themselves) is overly cautious, you should read that less as a criticism of U.S. diplomacy than a reflection of his distrust of the parties. He firmly believes that, given the opportunity, extremists on both sides will find ways to poison the atmosphere for talks. Consequently, he favors a more directive approach in which the President, backed by

like-minded European leaders, would tell the parties &enough
is enough⁸ and perhaps even impose the parameters of a deal.

Syria

¶4. (S/NF) The French view our cautious outreach to Syria with a mixture of ambivalence and bemusement. On the one hand, they are delighted that the U.S. is finally engaging Damascus) you may detect a certain sense of vindication from your interlocutors, who see our engagement as confirmation that Sarkozy,s policy was both correct and far-sighted. On the other hand, the French are mindful that their own currency has diminished somewhat in Damascus: they recognize that the Syrian regime,s focus now is on Washington, not Paris. Heavily influenced by the Syrian account of the Feltman/Shapiro visits, the French are puzzled by) and politely critical of) the pace of our engagement. Tactically, they believe that Washington shot itself in the foot by sending Feltman/Shapiro back to Damascus for a second round of talks without any deliverables and as the harbingers of bad news (i.e., the renewal of U.S. sanctions). Strategically, they wonder whether Washington has a clear vision of the relationship it wants with a regime that remains unlikely to curb its sponsorship of Hamas or Hizballah in a meaningful way.

¶5. (S/NF) The easiest way to address these concerns is to emphasize that we are engaging deliberately and carefully to produce a concrete change of behavior) just as Sarkozy did. Whereas for Paris the key benchmark was the establishment of

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normal diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, for Washington a crucial litmus test is Syrian performance on preventing foreign fighters from entering Iraq. You should be candid with Levitte about Syria,s failure to perform in this regard; Bill Burns was on May 14. The French are unlikely to directly challenge your assessment, although they may note that Prime Minister Maliki (who visited Paris on May 4) left them with a more favorable impression of Syrian efforts to secure the border. When A/S Feltman was here on May 20, he stressed to the French that there are limits to how the U.S. relationship with Damascus will evolve in the absence of better Syrian performance on Iraq. You may wish to expand on this point so that the French understand our approach is serious, disciplined, and riveted to concrete benchmarks. If you think it would be helpful for the French to reinforce any of the points you made in Damascus, they would be happy to do so) the French very much want to be seen by both parties as helping to broker improved relations between Washington and Damascus.

Lebanon

¶6. (S/NF) By the time you arrive in Paris, the French will have had several days to digest the results of the Lebanese elections. The French had anticipated that March 8 would perform slightly better than March 14. They also hoped that independent MPs aligned with President Sleiman would emerge as a significant third force in the new parliament, and thus provide an escape from the polarization that has characterized Lebanese politics over the past four years. They continue to invest heavily in Sleiman and bristled when the Lebanese opposition began muttering a few weeks ago about ousting Sleiman on a constitutional technicality and replacing him post-election with Michel Aoun.

What You Can Achieve

¶7. (S/NF) In addition to any other messages you may plan to deliver, it might be helpful to address three points during

your engagement with Levitte:

Debunk the notion that the President,s approach is not ambitious/fast enough: You can emphasize that we have moved beyond the &policy review8 period and are now engaging actively with the parties to lay the groundwork for successful negotiations. You may also wish to point out how the President,s matter-of-fact approach to the problem of settlements has won broad support and reshaped the conventional political wisdom in the U.S.

Outline your plan: Now that the Israelis have publicly balked at the Administration,s call for a complete freeze on settlements, the French await your thoughts on next steps. While they understand the U.S. is not seeking to generate a crisis with Israel, the French would not shed any tears if Netanyahu,s government collapsed and he were obliged to form a coalition with Kadima. The French will also be interested in sharing thoughts on how to &operationalize8 the Arab Peace Initiative.

Tell the French how they and other EU states can help: The French have gotten the message that they are not the main player on the peace process, and have begun to reconcile themselves to a supporting role. But they still want to play a role, and do not want to be relegated to tin-cup exercises, such as pressing the Arab Gulf states to regularize their budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority (although they recognize that there is a real need for such support). They would respond enthusiastically if you were to ask them to take on an assignment requiring political creativity, such as developing an action plan for reopening closed Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem (as per the Roadmap), or thinking about how to modernize and expand the mandate of the Multi-National Force Observers in the Sinai.

Final Thoughts

18. (S/NF) While the French are generally quite professional when it comes to high level exchanges, they have their leaks as well. This is less a problem at the Elyse than at the ministries, so you can be more candid with Levitte than you would be in an expanded meeting at the MFA.

Good luck with your travels in the region. We look forward to welcoming you again to Paris.

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Best regards,

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